

WITNESSES FOR GOD

NO. 3165

(Suggested by his being summoned to attend the police court as a witness)

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1909
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON
IN THE YEAR 1875

“Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD.”
Isaiah 43:10

IT is some time since I have known what it is to be at leisure. One's time from morning till night is occupied in different departments of the Master's service, and it has been peculiarly troublesome to me during the last week to be compelled to spend many hours in a police court. While sitting on the bench this text has again and again occurred to me—“Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD.”

A great trial is going on, of which all worlds constitute the jury—a great trial between the powers of evil and the one perfect Lord of good. Slanders have been vented against the name and majesty of heaven, and plots have been invented with the intent to overthrow holiness and truth. The whole fraternity of hell have stirred up their malicious craftiness to defame the God of heaven and earth. We know which way the suit will be decided, for we know where the truth lies, but lo, these many centuries the matter has been hanging in the balances.

Sometimes it has seemed that truth had gained the day, but at other times the powers of evil have come to the front. This trial is still proceeding. Satan brings up his witnesses, ready enough to lie and to establish the teachings of the father of lies, and on the other hand, the Lord brings up His witnesses to bear testimony for truth and righteousness. There are many in this place of whom the text speaks. “Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD.” We are summoned in this great trial of the ages to stand forward as witnesses for God.

Very simply indeed let us talk of this matter.

I. At the outset, we will take the simple assertion that WE ARE WITNESSES and inquire what sort of witnesses we ought to be?

I count it no small honor for the good Lord to call me as a witness in His case. Hence, I, for one, am a willing witness. I need no subpoena to compel me to come forward and bear such witness as I can for the glory of His great name. Such of you as can cheerfully come forward for the Lord should give their attention to the duty of witnesses. Let us see what are the main points of that duty.

First, *let us be present to witness, in our proper place, at the proper time.* I know some Christians who are of a very “retiring” disposition—I believe that is their favorite word. I fear the truth would say they are cowardly and hence they are silent when their witness should be borne. They are willing enough to bear testimony when thousands are doing the same and they can shout “Hosanna,” when all the streets are ringing with it—but not so many are prepared to witness for Christ when the hoarse cry of, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” is heard on every side.

If we are witnesses for God we are bound to be witnesses to all that we know, but flesh and blood will suggest to us to be out of the way when unpopular truths are in question. Certain brethren find it convenient to insist upon quiet portions of the Word of God and not on truths which might cause them trouble and provoke discussion.

That doctrine which is received already they will affirm, because all men agree with them, but the very portion of truth which most needs witnessing is shirked, and even looked down upon with disfavor.

Let us always be in the way when there is a witness wanted to be browbeaten and abused because he states the unpalatable truth. Never pick and choose in truth, or in your witness to it.

Or if you must make a choice, vindicate that truth most which is most despised. If you happen to be where men are blaspheming, witness against that blasphemy, calmly but firmly. If you dwell where error is taught, wait till you have a fair opportunity, and then stand up for Jesus. I do not say that you are to rush about like a knight-errant, fighting with everybody—but when there is a demand for a witness upon any point of truth, be you the man, and witness a good confession for Jesus your Lord.

Next, if we are witnesses for God, we should not only be in our place, but *we should be willing to speak up when the time comes*. No redeemed man must be in any degree an unwilling witness for his Lord. It is a pity when truth has to be extracted from us with as much difficulty as a decayed tooth. That is the best wine which flows most freely from the grape and that is the best testimony which a man bears with cheerful spirit because he values the truth in his own soul, and would have others prize it too.

The thought that our Lord Jesus was silent for us should prevent our ever being silent towards Him. One word from His mouth in Pilate's hall would have broken the spell which bound Him to death, but He would not speak it. And now, if one word from our lips would sign our death warrant, if it be a word for truth and Christ, let us speak it and joyfully accept the consequences. God's true children are never born dumb—therefore speak out like a true man. What you know, tell. What God has taught you, teach. What you have learned in the closet, proclaim on the housetop. And what was whispered in your ear in communion with your God, blaze it abroad before all men. Speak up, speak up for Jesus.

It is required of the Lord's witnesses that they speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Every witness in the court is sworn to do that, and every child of God is bound by the most solemn obligations to his Lord to do the same. Our God never requires a man to tell a lie for Him. The Jesuits have held the theory that the end sanctifies the means. And so those—I was going to say diabolical—beings suppose they are glorifying God when they heap falsehoods pile on pile.

One of the chief qualifications for a priest is to be able to tell a lie without the slightest sign of blushing—and I must give some of them credit for great proficiency in the art. Our Lord would not have us speak falsely for Him or even suppress the truth, to serve His cause. Occasions may sometimes arise when you feel—“Well, I don't know. My friend will be annoyed if I confess that truth. I will not exactly deny my belief in it, but I will depreciate it as a small matter of very slender importance.” Thus you will do evil that good may come.

Some say to themselves “I am in a false position, but had I not better remain in it, for it gives me great opportunities for usefulness. It is true I do not believe in the teaching of my church, but may I not still belong to it? Her catechism and ritual do not represent my views and there are many persons of an opposite way of thinking who are very glad to use the very language which I profess to believe in, and express thereby the most abominable of dogmas. All this is deplorable, but had I not better put up with it and go on as I am?”

My dear friend, I do not believe that God ever desires any of His people to occupy a position in which they cannot be strictly truthful. And I do not believe that He will justify them in retaining such a position. Whether I am useful or not is not one half as much my business as whether I am faithful and true. Equivocation and suppression of truth cannot serve the cause of God.

You are to speak *the truth* for God. He does not want you in one syllable or word to speak anything but the truth. And you are to bring out *all His truth* as far as the Lord has taught it to you. Do not conceal anything on the ground of policy. At the same time do not exalt any one truth out of its fair proportion. If a man's portrait had to be drawn, it would be a mistake to paint his nose and nothing else, or to make that organ so large that you could not see his eyes.

Never distort truth. Some doctrines fill up the background of a picture, but were never meant to stand in the front. Still, background, foreground, and every part must be truthful. My Lord will not call liars to witness for Him, for they are detestable in His sight.

Remember, also, that *we must be personal witnesses*. A witness the other day got as far as, “And he says to me, says he”—but he was immediately stopped with the sharp rebuke that it was not evidence and could not be listened to. In our courts of law, we do not allow secondhand evidence. “No,” says the judge, “what did you see yourself, my good man? We want to know that.”

It is so with regard to your witness for God. You must testify what you have seen and felt for yourselves. It is very easy to read biographies of good men, and then come forward and talk experience—but it is a very wicked thing to do. Let your experience be your own and your testimony for God be what you have tasted and handled of His good Word.

There is a vast difference between secondhand spiritual, gossiping experience and the firsthand personal testing and trying of the promise and the Word of God. You cannot tell what power you will have with children if you tell them how the Lord dealt with you when you were a child—and upon the unconverted, if you tell them what you have discovered of the folly of sinful pleasures and the emptiness of the world.

Nothing is more useful to a young convert than to tell him how *you* found the Savior and what the Savior has been to you. In dealing with those who are doubting and desponding, your own trials and your own deliverances will be the most helpful subjects. Personal experience must furnish you with personal testimony—and this you must never withhold.

In the matter of witnesses, there are great differences between one and another. Two witnesses may speak the truth, but you would far sooner believe one than the other, because of the previous character of the witness. Good lawyers do not count heads—but they weigh them—and if they have one man of known position and honesty, and he will assert such a thing, they scarcely need to support his evidence, whereas, half-a-dozen witnesses of rather a shady description will scarcely be able to prove a fact.

In witnessing for God, the holier your character the better. It does not do to say one thing with your mouth and another thing with your hand. Your witness for Jesus Christ in the school will be spoiled if at home there is no piety, if in business there is a want of honesty. If your character is doubtful, you will rather damage than help the good cause.

The devil once wanted to be a witness for Christ, and some of us would have thought it would be a fine stroke of policy to put the devil into the box, and make him speak the truth—but the Lord Jesus Christ would not have it. He said, “Hold thy peace and come out of him.” Truth did not want any assistance from the father of lies.

I do not invite the ungodly man to be a witness for Jesus Christ. Unto the wicked, God says, “What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?” Still, if you are a child of God, the weight of your evidence will be considerably lessened if your character be not pure. For your Lord’s sake, then, I beseech you, watch your lives and walk according to His commands.

Oh, never let it be said that Christ was wounded by us—by us for whom He died—by us who have leaned our heads upon His bosom. God grant that from first to last we may be mighty witnesses, because our character is known and read of all men. May the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us, help us in this matter.

One thing more. *Every witness should be ready to bear cross-examination.* Oh, how some Christians dislike this. Even as to joining a church, I frequently hear my brother ministers say that we should make the way into the church as easy as possible, that we should not question the “dear young friends,” and a lot of rubbish of that kind.

I, on the other hand, believe that if they cannot give a reason for the hope that is in them, it is time they should learn. And if they cannot face their own Christian brethren and relate their experience, it is more their minister’s fault than theirs. I am not going to gather together a horde of cowardly members, nor excuse any from declaring what the Lord has done for their souls.

There are plenty of churches where young ladies and gentlemen are taken in because they write a very pretty little letter, and some friend hopes they are all right, and so they are received—and thus we are inundated with people who never speak for Christ and tremble to call their souls their own. We have

too much of this kid-gloved, lavender-watered religion, and for my part I would not care to march through the world with such a regiment of feather-bed soldiers.

Give me the men who can bear persecution, who are ready to go into the streets and preach Christ at the corners, and are bold to speak a word for Jesus to anybody they shall meet. *We need a race of heroes*—of cowards we already have plenty. Dear friends, we must bear to be cross-examined, for the world *will* cross-examine us with harsh words, sneers, insinuations, misrepresentations, and falsehoods. The more outspoken we are, the more of running the gauntlet we shall have to undergo—but we must be prepared for it.

If our sires, not without blood, passed to their thrones, and we have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin, shall we speak of Christ with bated breath, or dastardly consent to hold our tongues? “I had as well not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I, myself.” Is a Christian man to be afraid of man, and conceal his principles for fear he should be ridiculed? God forbid. Leave shame for those who have no religion, or have a religion which is of no value. Let us be true witnesses for Christ in life and death, worthy of the ancestors that went before us and mindful of the eyes which rest upon us.

II. We will now change the strain and dwell upon the fact that WE HAVE EVIDENCE TO GIVE. Let us inquire to what matters of fact we are able to bear witness?

Let us think a little. Supposing us all to be Christian—we cannot all bear witness to precisely the same facts, because there is a growth of experience—but there are some facts to which all of us who know the Lord can bear most positive testimony.

First, we can bear witness to many of the attributes of God, as for instance, that *He is true*. We find Him stating in His Word that man is fallen—that his heart is deceitful. Is it so, brethren? What is your witness about yourselves? If you cannot speak of other people, how do you find it in yourselves?

Truly I must bear painfully decided witness to the depravity of my heart! When I saw, or thought I saw, the evil of my nature, I was driven to despair by the sight, and though a sight of Jesus Christ has given me peace, yet I can never forget how vile my nature is. It only needs that God should withdraw His grace, and as the floods drowned all the world, so would the deeps of our depravity drown everything gracious within us. We know that God has spoken the truth there, because facts in our own case prove it.

The Lord has promised that whoso believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall have eternal life. We have believed in Jesus Christ—have we found that new life has been bestowed to us? Let us speak out. Are we conscious of possessing a heavenly life? If there is anything true in the world, we are sure that this is so.

Grace has changed us. Eyes have we with which we see the invisible, ears have we with which we hear the eternal. We have learned to realize the things not seen as yet—our faith is “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” There is a spirit-life within us. We cannot describe it. We could not make another man who is unconscious of such a life know what it is—but that we have it is a certain fact and we bear willing witness to it.

There are some who ridicule religion altogether and have ridiculed this fact among the rest, yet they have no right to do so. There are many of us who are as honest and trustworthy as other people, and almost as sensible. If we were to enter a witness box, our evidence would not be questioned—even those who ridicule us would believe us there—why do they not believe us now? Why they should think it proven that there is no such thing as a new life, because they have not felt it, I cannot see. Negative evidence is worthless in such a case.

If we bear testimony that we have felt it, it is fair that they should accept the testimony, whether they personally know the truth of it or not. At any rate, let us be very, very plain about it and say, “Yes, our God was true in what He said about our fallen state, and God is true in what He says about the renewal of the soul by the Holy Ghost through faith in Jesus Christ.”

That God is true will also appear in His answering our prayers, His delivering us in time of trial, His fulfilling His promises, and in divers other ways. Whenever any of these occur to us, let us stand forth as witnesses and say, “Surely the Lord is true.”

We ought, also, to bear witness, beloved, to *the love of God*. We have an old proverb that everybody should speak as he finds. Speak of the Lord as you have found Him. I am sure that this is more than I shall ever be able to do to my own satisfaction. My blessed God! Was there ever any like You! If the gods of the heathen were gods, yet were they not worthy to be mentioned in the same day with our blessed God. What love He has lavished upon some of us!

I doubt not that all of you who know the Lord will echo my words, but I must say that the Lord surprises me every day with His lovingkindness and His tender mercies. He melts me down by the fires of His grace. I cannot understand why He is so good to me. If He had only pardoned His rebellious child and allowed Him to be a scullion in the royal kitchen, I would have kissed His feet with gratitude, but behold, He has said unto me, “You are no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir, and a joint heir with Jesus Christ.”

If He had only permitted me to have one glimpse of His love, so as to let my soul know that I was not utterly lost, I would have praised Him to all eternity. Instead of which, He has made all His goodness pass before me and proclaimed His glorious name. As to His tenderness to me in providence, His goodness in chastening, His gentleness in restoring me—I am overwhelmed with it. Blessed be His name! You may have what master you like, but He is mine forever. And you may worship what God you please, but I will have none but the Lord. You may praise up your beauties as you please, but my Beloved is altogether lovely.

Again, brethren, we can testify to our Lord’s *wisdom*, can we not? We younger folk cannot do it as well as our elders, but my veteran friends here who are getting into their sixties and seventies delight us when they speak of the wisdom of the Lord. You are living proofs that all the ways of the Lord are wise, for He has overruled all things for your good, and here you are to praise His name. By and by, when life’s journey is more nearly over, we shall be able to tell to others yet more of that wisdom and prudence wherein the Lord has abounded towards us. For the present let us testify what we know.

Beloved friends, we can also bear witness to *the immutability of God*. Of course, our span of life is so little at the longest that we cannot bear much witness to the eternal unchangeableness of JEHOVAH. Still, take our five-and-twenty years of Christian experience—or some of you can take your fifty—has there been any change in your God? We are fickle as the winds that blow, but there certainly has been no change in Him. He loved us and He loves us still. He forgave us and He forgives us still. He chastened us and He chastens us still. But He sustained us and He sustains us still.

*“Immutable His will;
Tho’ dark may be my frame,
His loving heart is still
Eternally the same.
My soul thro’ many changes goes,
His love no variation knows.”*

We have proved this by actual trial. Perhaps in the time of trouble we thought that His love was failing us, but in looking back we confess how wrong we were. There was as much love in the Lord’s chastening as in His caresses. We were as much loved when we were hiding under the shadow of His wings as when we were reveling in the light of His countenance. Blessed be His name, He changes not.

Now, brethren, besides the things which have a manifest respect to God, in which we are witnesses to the character of the Most High, there are other facts to which we testify and one is this—we can witness to *the power of prayer*. As I uttered that last word, my eye caught the glance of a sister below me whom I will not indicate. She and I know how we wrestled together in prayer for a certain sick daughter and how the Lord heard us, so that I rose from my knees and said to her, “Go your way. You

will find your daughter recovering when you reach the house.” She knows that she found it so and how, since then, in many other ways, God has heard her prayers.

I speak to some with whom prayer is an every-day matter—a commerce with God which they do not carry on at certain seasons, but all the year round—and if you do that, answers to prayer become so usual that you forget a large proportion of them and only the more singular abide upon your memory.

If a man tells me that God does not hear prayer, I laugh in his face. He might as well tell me that the sun does not shine, or that twice two does not make four. God hears prayer every day and every hour of the day—and I know it—and a man might sooner beat me out of the belief that I exist than out of this knowledge that God listens to my requests.

Upon this point I do not stand alone, for there are thousands who will unite in declaring, “Verily, there is a God that hears prayer.” When I hear brethren say how wonderful it is that God has heard prayer, I think it far more a wonder that they should talk so—for surely it is not surprising that God should keep His Word. No, these are the commonplaces of genuine Christianity—a prayer-giving God working in the heart—and a prayer-answering God working both in providence and in grace. Brethren, never be slow to bear your testimony to a prayer-hearing God.

We are also quite clear upon *the efficacy of the Gospel*. Where the Gospel is truly preached, there will be results, and where the Gospel is believed, it is the power of God unto salvation. Some here present are witnesses to that. You have taught a class in the school and you have seen the boys or girls converted to God. There are brethren in connection with this church who have evangelized the lowest parts of London, and they have seen those regions abound in precious fruit unto God.

Others have introduced the Gospel to the utterly fallen and they have seen them reclaimed. The manhood which appeared extinct has become bright. The womanhood which seemed to be crushed out has shone like a precious jewel. God’s Gospel has done wonders. It is not remarkable that a minister gets skeptical if he never sees conversions.

The proof of the Gospel lies in what it does. If it does not save men from sinning, if it does not lift up the fallen, if it does not give light and joy to the despairing, then, surely, it lacks the evidences of its divine mission—for even Jesus Christ Himself gave to His own mission this as the proof—“The deaf hear, the blind see, the lepers are cleansed, the poor have the gospel preached to them.” If these things be not true now, we may doubt whether the Gospel which we preach be the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But we can bear witness—and oh, how joyfully we do it!—that the Gospel has not lost its power.

Another point, as God’s witness, we can speak to *the sweetness of near communion with Himself*—a theme upon which I hardly dare to trust my wandering tongue. Oh, brethren, there is nothing like the joy which comes of high fellowship with God. Mr. Aitken told us the other afternoon that he would give us a recipe for being miserable. I think his words were—“be half-and-half Christians.”

He said, “If you are a worldling, you will get some sort of pleasure—you will get the painted bubble, though it will soon burst, but you *will* get that. And if you are a genuine, thorough-going Christian you will get the joy of the Lord. But if you are a sort of neither-this-nor-the-other, you will get nothing.” Have you never seen little boys, when they go to bathe in the morning, stand up to their knees shivering? Of course they shiver. The way to get warm is to plunge in head first. Some professors stand in very shallow water, and they shiver and cry—

*“Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought”—*

and so on. Oh, my brother, give yourself up wholly to Christ, and the joy of the Lord will be yours as it is ours. These are some of the things we can speak of.

III. Very briefly, in the third place. When a witness is called for one side he is against the other side—so we also must remember that OUR EVIDENCE CONDEMNS THE OTHER SIDE.

We are witnesses *against sin*. Sin comes with a painted face like Jezebel, but we witness that she is a destroyer and must die. The pleasures of sin are but a masquerade of misery. Happy they who never drink of the cup which this siren presents. May God grant that none of our young friends may try the pleasures of vice, for they are as deadly hemlock. Those who have been converted in later life bear very sorrowful witness that sin is misery and that the wages of sin is death.

We bear witness also *against self*. Many say with the proverb, “Self is the man”—self will save—self is righteous. But our witness is that self has no strength to perform his own resolutions, that self is a ragged beggar when he thinks himself a king—that self is emptiness and vanity, deceit and death. We bear that witness now and we always shall have to bear it.

We bear our witness *against unbelief*. Is there any Christian here who has ever gained anything by being unbelieving? Has any child of God ever escaped from trouble by mistrusting the faithfulness of the Lord? No. We have been losers all round by our unbelief, but never gainers. Unbelief is a sorry cheat.

Mr. Bunyan says that Incredulity was taken and condemned to be hung, but he very rightly said that he broke out of prison, “for he was a nimble-jack.” The only part of “Pilgrim’s Progress” that I felt inclined to find fault with was where Mr. Greatheart cut Giant Despair’s head off—for to my knowledge he is still alive. But Bunyan sets that right by saying in his rhyme—

*“Sin can rebuild his castle, make’t remain,
And make Despair, the giant, live again.”*

Oh, that wretched unbelief. Brethren, let your witness against it be clear and distinct.

Moreover, we bear testimony *against Satan*, whom we know to be a deceiver, a liar and a murderer. Evil is never good, nor dare we give place to it in order to turn it to useful ends. We must resist the evil one, steadfast in the faith, and ever witness that he is the deadly foe of the soul, whatever disguise he may assume.

IV. In closing, let me say that there are times when our witness is peculiarly valuable. Do you ask—and when is that? I reply, Your witness will be precious when others are sinfully silent. If you live in a place where there are few earnest Christians, and error abounds, be faithful, my brother. Your light is needed where lamps are few.

You need not find fault with others, for that will not help the matter. If the place is dark, shine the more, if error prevails, hold forth the truth. There is no argument against error equal to truth, advocated, delighted in, and practiced. Testimony becomes more precious as it becomes more scarce. You might have held your tongue, perhaps, had advocates been plentiful, but now that they are so few, be doubly earnest, like your divine Lord to bear witness to the truth.

Witnesses become valuable, again, in times of persecution. Have you been made to suffer for Christ’s sake? Brother, be glad, for, “so persecuted they the prophets that were before you.” If you can be patient, if you can bear ridicule without resentment, if, being reviled, you do not revile again, you have a grand opportunity.

The world looks on a man under scoffing and ridicule to observe how he behaves. And if he conducts himself like a Christian, it feels his power and respects his consistency. Give way a little, and you will have to give way more—and be despised. But adherence to principle commands respect. Put your foot down. Stand firmly where God would have you stand, and your testimony will gather value from the very ridicule which is poured upon it.

My brethren and sisters, *your testimony will be none the less valuable because you are poor*. Nothing does the Gospel more honor than the godly lives of humble Christians. It honors the Gospel when a man both wears a coronet and prays, but how few have done so! The poor man who is happy, contented, thankful, and trustful is one of God’s nobility, and the church of God honors him. We rejoice to see such men standing in the witness box to declare the lovingkindness of the Lord.

Testimony becomes all the weightier as we grow older. People pay more attention to the words of experienced men. It is natural and right that they should do so. As years creep upon us, we ought to be all the more earnest that our testimony for God should be clear, solid, and frequent. An aged Christian who has little or nothing to say for his Master is a sad drawback to young beginners.

I very greatly deprecate the example of some who have long been professors, but who still remain babes in Christ, if they be in Christ at all. It is a great pity to see the head white with the sunlight of heaven, and yet so little of heaven in the daily conversation. Rise up, you grave and reverend sires, and declare the faithfulness of our God.

Very choice, too, are the testimonies of the sick. It is a great trial when those whom we love are continually suffering, we wish we could bear their pains awhile and give them respite, yet no greater blessing can come to a man's house than an afflicted child of God. The tried ones go so deep, they speak so sincerely and so touchingly. There is no nonsense about their religion. Racking pain very soon drives away illusions, and pretences and shams do not stand before the solemn reality of continued sickness.

Witnesses in the furnace of affliction are powerful indeed. We hear no songs in the night till breasts are pierced with the thorn. If there were not some who, like the Arab divers, plunge deep into the depths of sorrow, we should have fewer pearls, but there are such and their testimonies are precious. When your turn and mine comes to go upstairs awhile, and preach from our beds, God grant that we may deliver gracious sermons.

Lastly, *there is something peculiarly valuable about the testimony of the dying saint.* The Lord might well say to these, "Ye are my witnesses." Some of us remember testimonies that we were privileged to gather up from dying men's lips and they have been great strengtheners to our faith. I remember a brother who used to walk out to preach in the villages, a man of very little talent, but with a great heart.

I hardly know any word of witness more powerful than the utterances of his last hours. He was blinded by disease, and when he heard a friend's voice he addressed him thus—

*"And when ye see my eyestrings break,
How sweet my minutes roll!
A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul."*

His tones of joy added deep solemnity to his words.

Oh, those sweet testimonies of the dying, how we store them up! Children talk of Jesus in their last hours as wisely as old men. Mothers and fathers leave witnesses behind them precious as gems. But I refrain—you and I will go soon—may divine grace enable us to expire with a glad witness on our tongues.

Alas, I recollect as I finish that some of you are not witnesses for God, for you know nothing about Him. Remember, if you are not witnesses for God, you will be prisoners at His bar, and you must either occupy the witness box for God, or else take the prisoner's place—to be tried and found guilty.

Oh, sinners, I wish you would try our God, whose witnesses we are. If we had found Him untrue, we would tell you. If we had found that Christ could not save, we would tell you. If we had found that God could not pardon, we would tell you. If religion made us miserable, we would tell you, or you would find it out. If God could not be trusted in providence and did not hear prayer, we would tell you, for we hope we would not maintain a lie.

But we have no such disclosures to make. We bear our willing testimony for God. Remember, it is written, "Him that cometh to me, I will in nowise cast out." Go and test the veracity of that promise, and God bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 CHRONICLES 21:1-8

Verse 1. *And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.*

Israel had greatly offended and grieved God, and it was to be punished. God punished one sin by another—the sin of David works for the chastisement of a sinful people.

2. *And David said to Joab and to the rulers of the people, Go, number Israel from Beer-sheba even to Dan; and bring the number of them to me, that I may know it.*

He had got proud, he had begun to depend upon the number of his people. In truth, it was a large population under his sway—five millions or more—and he who had been a shepherd lad, that in his early youth had trusted in his God, now thinking himself a great man, somewhat in the spirit of Nebuchadnezzar, begins to say, “Behold, this great kingdom that I have gathered and founded.”

3. *And Joab answered, The LORD make his people an hundred times so many more as they be: but, my lord the king, are they not all my lord's servants? why then doth my lord require this thing? why will he be a cause of trespass to Israel?*

It adds greatly to a wrong action if we are checked in it—and especially if we are checked in it by a man who has not any conscience to spare, but yet, notwithstanding his roughness, such as Joab had, nevertheless expostulates with you, “Why do this?” The people generally understood that, when they were numbered, it was with a view to taxing them, it was with a view of showing David’s sovereignty over them.

Now David was not their sovereign, the Lord God was their King—David was but the Viceroy—and when he began to count them as though they were his own, it was a source of great indignation to the Most High. I am afraid when you and I begin to count up what we have done, begin to reckon upon how much we have given, or how much we have effected for God, we begin to appropriate a measure of glory to ourselves.

We had better leave that alone, for although pride may not seem a great sin in the eye of men, it is assuredly that which brings the utmost wrath from the Most High. He cannot endure pride, especially in those whom He has lifted up. He took David from the sheepfold—and if David has now become great—David must be brought down again.

4-6. *Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab. Wherefore Joab departed, and went throughout all Israel, and came to Jerusalem. And Joab gave the sum of the number of the people unto David. And all they of Israel were a thousand thousand and an hundred thousand men that drew sword: and Judah was four hundred threescore and ten thousand men that drew sword. But Levi and Benjamin counted he not among them: for the king's word was abominable to Joab.*

So he did no more of it than he could possibly help.

7-8. *And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel. And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly, because I have done this thing: but now, I beseech thee, do away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.*

We read that David’s heart smote him. Although he had gone wrong, he was nevertheless a good man, and when an ambitious man sins, it is a great sin, but it is not long that he continues in it—his conscience is awakened—the Spirit of God is in him. David’s heart smote him. That is a terrible blow when your own heart smites you. If you never feel any other person smiting you, you will feel that.

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